

The Doctrine of the Sanctuary

by Pastor Gary Taber

The Role of Doctrine

Doctrines have a very vital place in our Christian experience. If rightly used and understood. However, when doctrines are used as a means to prove spiritual superiority or lead to a mere mental assent to truth (as long as I believe the right things I am okay) but fail to make us Christ-like, they can become harmful, rather than helpful. Ellen White stated this extremely well in *Desire of Ages*, pp. 308-309. Here is what she said: *“Many take it for granted that they are Christians, simply because they subscribe to certain theological tenets (or doctrines). But they have not brought the truth into practical life. They have not believed and loved it, therefore, they have not received the power and grace that come through the sanctification of the truth. Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly-minded, it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence, it is a curse to the world.”* We have all seen Christians standing tall for truth by belittling the faith and experience of others. Piously proclaiming the importance of truth, while behaving towards others unkindly and even cruelly.

For me, the key to doctrines is to ask two questions. What does this doctrine teach me about God? And how does this doctrine affect my relationship with God? If a doctrine is not consistent with the character of God, then I must re-evaluate that doctrine. For example, the doctrine of an eternally burning hell is inconsistent with a God of love. How could a God of love torture his children (even though they are rebellious) forever in hell? And wouldn't such an action of God cause people to serve him more from fear than from love?

And so, as we look at the doctrine of the sanctuary, we must ask these two questions. As I have studied this topic, I have concluded that it is consistent with God's character of love, justice and holiness. I have also concluded that this doctrine gives me great assurance to know that God will indeed be able to justify the sinner and take redeemed sinners to heaven and allow rebellious sinners to experience the results of their choice, to be eternally separated from God's presence.

History of the Sanctuary Doctrine

The doctrine of the sanctuary is the one unique teaching of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Others, such as the Seventh Day Baptists, teach the Sabbath. There is a growing number of Christians who believe as we do about hell, including well-known theologian John Stott and the evangelical theologian, Clark Pinnock. We are alone in our belief about the sanctuary, or the investigative judgment. This teaching has received much criticism through the years, from both outside our church and inside our church.

The doctrine of the sanctuary goes back to the experience and teaching of William Miller. In his personal study of the Bible, he came to the passage in Daniel 8:13-14 that reads: *13Then I heard one saint speaking, and another saint said unto that certain saint which spake, How long shall be the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, and the transgression of desolation, to give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot? 14And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.* Miller, using his concordance, came to the conclusion that Daniel 8:14 was linked to Leviticus 16, which gives the instructions for how

the Israelites were to observe the Day of Atonement, one of the 3 major festivals God gave the Israelites through Moses.

Miller concluded that the Day of Atonement, in which the sanctuary was cleansed from the *forgiven* sins of God's people and were removed to the wilderness by the scapegoat, pointed forward to the second coming of Jesus when the world would be cleansed from all sin by fire. Miller believed that the 2,300 evenings and mornings of Dan. 8:14 refer to 2,300 prophetic days which are really 2,300 years. Upon studying the visions and prophecies of Daniel 7 through 9, Miller concluded that Christ would come in 1843. After much spiritual wrestling, he began to preach this message in 1833.

When Christ did not come in the spring of 1843, Miller restudied the passages to see if he had miscalculated or misunderstood the passage. He then concluded that Christ would come by the spring of 1844, which would be the end of the Jewish year. When that did not occur, they again re-examined their calculations and discovered that a more accurate interpretation would be that Christ would come on October 22, 1844, on the Day of Atonement. When this date passed and nothing seemed to occur, further study, encouraged by a vision Hiram Edson received in a corn field, brought the pioneers of our church to a new understanding. They now believed that they had correctly calculated the time of the prophecy but had been wrong about what was to have taken place. The resulting study led to the doctrine the Seventh-day Adventist Church would refer to as the Investigative Judgment.

There are people in the church today who question this doctrine. However, I still believe in it for reasons I will state later.

A Misunderstood Doctrine

Much of the criticism and doubt regarding this teaching stems, I believe, from a misunderstanding and misapplication of the meaning and purpose of this doctrine. When I was growing up, I was taught that during the Investigative Judgment all of my sins would be publicly reviewed and if there was one that I hadn't confessed, I was toast. Who could possibly remember and confess all the sins they had committed? And what about our sins being tossed into the depths of the sea and being remembered no more? (Micah 7:19) Since the basic issue in the Investigative Judgment, as often presented, was focused on man's actions and activities instead of on God and His activities, this emphasis left most Adventists with little assurance of salvation, little hope of gaining eternal life and fear of facing God. And more importantly, it is not consistent with God's grace and love. God was portrayed as being more interested in keeping people out of heaven than in saving them.

One of the main reasons given for the need to make sure every sin was confessed, was a statement Ellen White made in the book *Great Controversy* which said that, "*When any have sins remaining upon the books of record, unrepented of and unforgiven, their names will be blotted out of the book of life, and the record of their good deeds will be erased from the book of God's remembrance.*" p. 483 However, in the context of the chapter, the idea is that sins being mentioned are those that people have refused to repent of and forsake, not ones that they may have forgotten to confess. Besides, where did we ever get the idea that remembering all the sins we need to confess is up to us. Jesus Himself said that the work of the Holy Spirit is to "*convict us of sin, righteousness and judgment to come.*" (John 16:7-11).

A Different Approach

So does this mean that we should scrap the doctrine of the Sanctuary? As I stated earlier, I don't believe so. I think we need to understand this doctrine with the following in mind: it is His judgment according to Revelation 14:6-7 (by that I mean it is about God's character), it is done to show how God can bring sinners into a perfect heaven, and finally, it is done so that sin will not arise a second time (Nahum 1:9).

Let me begin by explaining what took place once a year on the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement was one of the 5 festivals that were celebrated by the Israelites each year. They are listed in the order in which they celebrated each year: the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Feast of Trumpets which announced the Day of Atonement, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths or Harvest.

The Day of Atonement was to show how God ultimately deals with sin. Each day the sins of the people could be forgiven through the sacrifices made in the courtyard of the sanctuary. Each day the sins were transferred from sinner to sacrifice. Each day the sins would then be symbolically carried into the Holy Place. But how could the sins remain in the Holy Place and even through the incense be carried into the Most Holy Place, into God's very presence, without affecting the holiness that was there? God's answer was seen on the Day of Atonement, as described in Leviticus 16.

On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest, after making a sacrifice for his own sins and for the sins of his family, made a sacrifice for the Israelites and then for all the people. Then he would take 2 goats and cast lots to see which one would represent the Lord and which one would be the scapegoat. Next he would sacrifice the Lord's goat as a sin offering, take some blood into the Most Holy Place and sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat, in the Holy Place and on the altar. Then he would come out and place his hands on the live scapegoat, confess the sins of the people over the head of the scapegoat (called Azazel in Hebrew). After this a man who had been chosen would lead the goat out into the wilderness, away from God's people and His sanctuary where His presence was revealed through the shekinah glory, a symbol of his character. Thus the Day of Atonement was a way to symbolically show God's people how God is able to so utterly remove their sins from both them and His presence that their sins would be gone—forever. It also showed how Satan will have to bear the responsibility for his part in causing the people to sin.

Finally, it is important to remember that both Daniel 7 and the last 2 chapters of Revelation tell us that the judgment involves the 'books' in heaven. Remembering that Revelation is highly symbolic, it is not important whether or not there are actual books, just that there are records being kept that will enable God to show how the saved are saved and why the lost are lost. Furthermore, Revelation 21:27 says that the redeemed have their name written in the Lamb's Book of life. Which is usually understood as being the book owned by the Lamb. However, another way to translate it is to say that the names of the redeemed are written in the Book of the Life of the Lamb. Which means it is the book that tells about the life of the Lamb. Therefore, anyone whose name is written in the book of the Life of the Lamb has received the character of the Lamb. When God looks at their lives, He sees Jesus. When Satan tries to accuse them of sins they have committed, Jesus says, my blood is sufficient. They have received his righteousness. When God looks at our lives, he sees the life of Jesus.

Which means that the judgement is good news. It provides us with the assurance that we are the beloved sons and daughters of God. It tells us that God's plan of redemption is so complete, that

sin will be dealt with once and for all. It tells us that the entire universe will recognize that God is love, merciful and just at the same time.

Why I Still Believe in the Investigative Judgment

I still believe in the Investigative Judgment primarily because of the following three reasons:

1. The Investigative Judgment fits together with the millennium to show how God is able to be just and justifier of sinners. To show how He is able to save sinners and take them to a perfect heaven without infecting heaven with sin. God first begins with the investigative judgment prior to the second coming so that unfallen beings in heaven (whether angels or beings from unfallen worlds) will have the opportunity to see how Christ's sacrifice has cleansed them from sins committed and how Christ's righteousness and the power of the resurrection have transformed their lives. Then the redeemed will have the opportunity during the millennium to do the same (Rev. 20:1-6). Finally, the lost will have the same opportunity at the end of the millennium to see that God has saved all that could be saved and those who are lost were lost by their own choice. If there were no investigative judgment, God could simply come back and deal with the righteous and the wicked at the same time.
2. The Investigative Judgment is the only explanation of the Day of Atonement that makes sense. All the festivals pointed forward to key events in the plan of salvation. The first one, Passover and Unleavened Bread, pointed back to the events of the Exodus and forward to the death of Jesus. The second, Pentecost, was a celebration of the first fruits of the harvest, and pointed forward to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit when the "first fruits" of the last days (the days after the coming of the Messiah) would be gathered. The third was the Feast of Trumpets, which was a feast that took place 10 days prior to the Day of Atonement when the trumpets were blown to announce the coming of the Day of Atonement in order to get people to prepare for the Day of Atonement. I find it fascinating that William Miller began proclaiming the message of the cleansing of the sanctuary 10 years prior to 1844. The fourth feast was the Day of Atonement. And the fifth feast was the Feast of Booths or Harvest, which looked back to the Israelites entering into the promised land and also looked forward to God's people entering into the heavenly Canaan. Therefore, the Day of Atonement must occur sometime between Pentecost and the second coming.
3. There are very few other interpretations given for the meaning of the Day of Atonement. Jewish teachings connect it to a day of judgment for this life. Most Christians see it as merely another symbol for Christ's sacrifice for us. I have yet to find an alternative interpretation that makes sense.

Some Objections

Most Christians believe that this teaching is false because only Jesus can forgive sin. If the scapegoat is Satan, then Satan would be able to forgive. But this concern overlooks two facts. First, the second goat does not die at the hands of the priest, instead it is led out into the wilderness to die there naturally. Scripture is clear, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness for sin (Heb. 9). And second, the scapegoat corresponds perfectly with what takes place during the millennium, when Satan is left alone with his angels to view the desolating results of their rebellion—a destroyed earth (Rev. 20:1-6) It is not that Satan pays the penalty for the sins of the

world, rather he is forced to face the consequences of his rebellion. An adult would be guilty of any crime they were able to persuade a minor to commit. Plus they would also be guilty of adding to the delinquency of a minor. Thus the scapegoat adequately represents the fact that Satan must acknowledge his responsibility for instigating the sins committed by God's people. It is only when he is removed that God's people will be free from the sin that so easily besets us.

It is interesting to me that Satanism teaches that Azazel, symbolized by a goats head, is the symbol of the Devil. It has been for years.

Some object to the doctrine of the sanctuary because they say the atonement, or reconciliation of God with man took place at the cross, therefore the Day of Atonement points to Calvary. However, that was clearly the meaning of Passover. Jesus died on Passover. The Day of Atonement does not teach that the atonement at Calvary wasn't adequate. On the contrary, it shows how the death of Jesus on the cross is able to completely and eternally remove sin from His people and still keep His own character of love, justice and holiness beyond question. It is not teaching that the atonement is incomplete, but rather shows how the atonement makes it possible for God to save sinners while remaining holy. How he is able to be just while justifying sinners.

Others object because they say there is no tie between Daniel 8:14 and Leviticus 16. And they further contend that the application of a day for a year in prophecy isn't valid. The context of Daniel (whose name, interestingly, means God is my judge) is four visions that deal with the sweep of history, especially the roles of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. The first vision in chapter 2 deals with the general history of earthly kingdoms culminating with the establishment of God's kingdom. The second vision deals with Nebuchadnezzar's place in history (chapter 4). Then comes the visions of chapters 7 and 8. These visions build on that of Chapter 2 with each one adding some new insights. The vision of chapter 7 adds the aspect of Rome becoming a religious/political power and the fact that prior to Christ's coming, a judgment scene will occur in heaven with an examination of the books. (Dan. 7:9-14) The vision of Daniel 8 builds on the visions of Daniel 2 and 7. The added element? The 2300 evenings and mornings that dealt with the sanctuary being cleansed or made right. Daniel 7 tells us what must take place prior to Christ's return: a judgment. Daniel 8 tells us when this judgment will occur, after the passing of the 2300 days/years.

As to the concerns that the application of a day for a year in prophecy is forced upon the text by SDA's, a study of history and the beliefs of other churches reveals that many have seen the obvious conclusion that Daniels concern for the extending of the 70 years of captivity (cf. Daniel 9:2) by 2300 days does not make sense if they were literal years. For that would add a mere 6.4 years to the 70 years of captivity or just 3.2 years if you divide the 2300 days into 2300 evening and morning sacrifices. Also, almost all the reformers saw this as referring to years as well as many throughout history. And while we disagree with the dates and application of the the 2300 days, many evangelicals believe that this represents a period of years equal to either 2300 years or 1150 years. In the Harper's Study Bible, RSV, there is a footnote for Daniel 9: 24-25, which states that "it is self-evident that each week must be a period of seven years"

Conclusion

I believe that the investigation judgment, in which the character of God will be open to the closest of scrutiny, will end in the vindication of God's character, allow him to put a final and complete end to sin, and therefore provides assurance to all that God is indeed worthy of our worship.